

# Hunger Among Seniors in Cook County

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## An Analysis of Older Adult Federal Nutrition Programs

Study conducted for the Greater Chicago Food Depository  
by the Social IMPACT Research Center

May 2012



## Study Information

This study was conducted by the Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance.

Research was led by Amy Terpstra with support from Jeffrey Fiore, Jonah Kushner, and Ethan Brown.

*The **Social IMPACT Research Center** (IMPACT) is a nonprofit organization that investigates today's most pressing social issues and solutions to inform and equip those working toward a just global society. IMPACT, a program of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, provides research, policy analysis, consulting, technical assistance, communications, and coalition building to projects in Illinois, the Midwest, and nationally. Visit [www.heartlandalliance.org/research](http://www.heartlandalliance.org/research) to learn more.*

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# Executive Summary

The Social IMPACT Research Center (IMPACT), at the request of the Greater Chicago Food Depository, conducted a geographic analysis of primarily federally-funded nutrition programs that target older adults. The goal of the project is to better understand what Chicago Community Areas and Suburban Cook County townships are most underserved by federally-funded nutrition programming in relation to the number of older adults likely to have need for food assistance.

## Methods Summary

Though they vary in their mode of delivery, federally-funded programs for older adults provide nutritional support to seniors who have too low of incomes to be able to afford enough food or who cannot access and prepare food on their own. To conduct this geographic analysis, IMPACT gathered administrative data (annual) from the providers and state agencies that administer nutrition programs used by older adults. The federally-funded programs included in the analysis that make up the supply side for this analysis are:

- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Congregate Meals
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program
- Home Delivered Meals
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program

Adults ages 65 and over who fall below 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold, a standard that qualifies many people for federal nutrition programs, make up the demand side for this analysis. The 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year estimates program provides these data.

In light of variations related to geography (e.g., municipal, township, county) and level of measurement (e.g., dollar amounts, meals, people served) of the original nutrition program data, IMPACT standardized all units, converting all measures of levels of assistance to meals per year and converting all units of geography to Chicago Community Areas (CCAs) in Chicago and townships in Suburban Cook County.

The number of meals was then divided by the number of economically vulnerable older adults to determine the number of meals served on an annual basis per person in need, represented as a ratio of meals served to older adults in need. Ratios were then compared across Chicago Community Areas (neighborhoods) in Chicago and townships in Suburban Cook County.

## Calculation Used to Determine Program Coverage

$$\text{Number of meals (supply)} \div \text{Number of economically vulnerable older adults (demand)} = \text{Number of meals served per person in need annually}$$

It is important to note that many of the programs included here distribute meals in various manners. This analysis is a macro look at program coverage and so spreads all meals served evenly over all people in need of assistance to help understand the adequacy of federal nutrition programs. It is not an indication of any given older adult's experience receiving food assistance or any agency's experience distributing meals.

## Key Findings

*Hundreds of thousands of older adults are at risk of hunger and food insecurity in Cook County:* There are over 115,000 older adults in Chicago with incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold (less than \$19,347 for a senior living alone and less than \$24,111 for a senior-headed two-person household) and nearly 68,000 more in Suburban Cook County. Living on a fixed income in Cook County where it takes an income higher than 185 percent of the poverty threshold to just pay for basic needs,<sup>1</sup> forces many seniors to make tradeoffs between food and other necessities.

*Available resources for federal nutrition programs are not commensurate with need:* When all federally-funded resources are considered, there are a total of 39,535,708 meals served annually in Chicago and 15,303,150 in Suburban Cook County. This translates to 342 meals per person in need in Chicago and 226 in Suburban Cook County a year. Considering that any given individual eating three meals a day consumes 1,095 meals a year, older adults with very limited resources are collectively left fending for themselves on low incomes for 69 percent of their meals in Chicago and 79 percent in Suburban Cook County.

*Resources for older adult nutrition programming are particularly scarce in Suburban Cook County:* There are 51 percent more meals served per person in need on an annual basis in Chicago than in Suburban Cook County, though the magnitude of unmet need (the number of unserved/unreached/underreached individuals) is still greater in Chicago.

*Certain areas of Cook County have less program coverage than others:* The Chicago Community Areas with the least program coverage—Norwood Park, Edison Park, Garfield Ridge, Clearing, and Mount Greenwood—are clustered around the edges of the city. These community areas range from having 115 to 129 meals annually to every older adult in need, compared to 342 meals in the city overall. Four of the 5 townships with least program coverage—Lemont, Hanover, Orland, and Schaumburg—are on either the northwest or southwest edges of Cook County. Program coverage in these townships ranges from 48 to 137 meals to every older adult in need, compared to 226 meals in Suburban Cook County overall.

<sup>1</sup> Health and Medicine Policy Research Group. (2011). *Elder Economic Security Initiative (EESI) Illinois*. Available at: [http://hmprg.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/ElderEconomicSecurity\\_Illinois.pdf](http://hmprg.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/ElderEconomicSecurity_Illinois.pdf)

*SNAP is the cornerstone of nutritional assistance for older adults:* As a percent of all nutrition-program meals, SNAP provides the resources for the vast majority of the meals for those in need in both Chicago (296 meals per person in need—87 percent of total meals) and Suburban Cook County (204 meals per person—90 percent of total meals). In the absence of SNAP, there would be only 46 meals per person in need in Chicago and 22 per person in need in Suburban Cook. It is important to note, however, that despite SNAP providing for the lion’s share of meals, only 34 percent of eligible older adults receive SNAP.<sup>2</sup>

## Recommendations

- **Food and nutrition programs**, particularly SNAP, are critical supports for low-income older adults **and should be protected and expanded**. For example:
  - The Farm Bill sets policy and funding levels for SNAP, CSFP, and TEFAP. The next Farm Bill needs to ensure these programs adequately serve this population.
  - Federal funding for both congregate and home delivered meals is included in the Older Adult Act, which should be **protected and expanded**.
- While SNAP is the primary source for food assistance in Cook County for older adults, there is great room for improvement, and **SNAP outreach targeted to older adults should increase**.
- **Use data-driven metrics to inform food distribution decisions**. Analyses like this one illuminate areas of greatest unmet need and allow for more effective and efficient targeting of resources.

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<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2011). *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation rates: Fiscal years 2002-2009 (Summary)*. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Trends2002-09Sum.pdf>

# Introduction

The Social IMPACT Research Center (IMPACT), at the request of the Greater Chicago Food Depository, conducted an analysis of meals served through federally-funded nutrition programs that target older adults, comparing meals served to the number of economically vulnerable adults. The goal of the project is to better understand what Chicago Community Areas and Suburban Cook County townships are most underserved by federally-funded nutrition programming in relation to the number of older adults likely to have need for food assistance.

To this end, IMPACT gathered administrative data from the providers and state agencies that administer nutrition programs used by older adults (the supply) and used the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year estimates program to determine the number of economically vulnerable adults who are likely to need food assistance (the demand).

## Supply

The federally-funded programs included in this analysis that make up the supply side of this analysis are:

### *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)*

CACFP is administered by the Illinois Department on Aging with a grant from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.<sup>3</sup> CACFP serves nutritious meals and snacks to eligible adults at participating adult day care centers. In Cook County, the vast majority of these adults are older adults.

### *Congregate Meals Program (CM)*

The Congregate Meals Program provides hot meals for older adults in group settings such as churches and senior centers. The City of Chicago runs the program in Chicago (and calls it Golden Diners) and Age Options runs it in Suburban Cook County, with federal funding administered by the Illinois Department on Aging.

### *Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)*

The CSFP provides a monthly food package to low-income adults, the vast majority of whom are seniors. With federal funds filtered through the Illinois Department of Human

### A Note on Criteria for Inclusion in this Study

The programs included in this study together comprise the vast majority of meals available to older adults and are included here because of their far-reaching nature—they are federally-funded and similarly available across Cook County. There are a variety of smaller programs that target older adults in certain townships or cities or through specific agencies, which did not meet the criteria for inclusion in this study. For instance, the Greater Chicago Food Depository supplements its federally-funded programs with private and corporate donations; food/meals funded this way are not included in this study. There is also a Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program administered through the Illinois Department of Human Services, which distributes redeemable coupons valued at \$21 to seniors for use at farmer's markets from July through October. Due to the fact that the program's records only track booklets distributed, not redeemed and the barriers for many older adults getting to farmer's markets (proximity, transportation, health) this program was also not included in the analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The child portion of the program is administered by the Illinois State Board of Education.

Services, Catholic Charities runs the program in Cook County.

#### *Home Delivered Meals Program (HDM)*

Under the HDM program, pre-made meals are delivered to homebound older adults who are unable to personally prepare nutritious meals themselves. In Illinois, the Illinois Department of Aging administers the HDM program with federal funding, supplemented with a small amount of state funding.<sup>4</sup> The City of Chicago runs the HDM program in Chicago, and Age Options runs it in Suburban Cook County. The federally- and state-funded HDM programs allow for home delivered meals on weekdays only, so Illinois participates in a public/private partnership program, Meals on Wheels Illinois, which is designed to raise funds for holiday, weekend, and emergency meals, helping fill the “gaps” left by federal and state funded home-delivered meal programs. This analysis includes both HDM and Meals on Wheels under the HDM category.

#### *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*

SNAP, formerly called food stamps, helps low-income families and individuals buy food they need for good health. In Illinois, benefits are provided on a Link card, which works like a debit card. The USDA’s Food and Nutrition Services administers the program, funneling funds through the Illinois Department of Human Services, which runs the program in Illinois.

#### *The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)*

Under the TEFAP, commodity foods are made available by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to states. In Illinois, the Illinois Department of Human Services partners with local agencies, usually food banks, which in turn distribute the food to soup kitchens and food pantries that directly serve the public. The Greater Chicago Food Depository distributes food under TEFAP for Cook County.

Data on the level of assistance provided through each of these programs are recorded by administrators in various manners: some record the number of meals served, some the number of pounds of food distributed, and yet others the number of individuals served. Similarly, each program records data at different geographic levels: some data are collected by zip code, some by municipality, some by township, and some by location of the provider. Data for the CSFP are recorded only at the county level, and therefore administrators could only report the program data for Cook County as a whole.

In light of these variations, IMPACT standardized all units of measurement and geography, converting all measures of levels of assistance to meals per year and converting all units of geography to Chicago Community Areas (CCAs) in Chicago and townships in Suburban Cook County. Detail on the data sources and exact manner of these conversions for each program is listed in the Appendix.

It is also important to note that many of these programs distribute meals in various manners. This analysis is a macro look at program coverage and so spreads all meals served evenly over all people in need of assistance (see Demand section below) to help understand the adequacy of federal nutrition programs. It is not an indication of any given older adult’s experience receiving food assistance or any agency’s experience distributing meals.

## **Demand**

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<sup>4</sup> Illinois contributed \$1.6 million to the HDM program.



The demand for food assistance programs was operationalized as individuals ages 65 and over who fall below 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold. In 2010, 185 percent of the poverty threshold for a senior living alone was \$19,347. For a 2-person household headed by a senior, it was \$24,411.<sup>5</sup> Living on a fixed income in Cook County where it takes an income higher than 185 percent of the poverty threshold to just pay for basic needs,<sup>6</sup> forces many seniors to make tradeoffs between food and other necessities.

There is some variation in the specific age cutoffs used by food assistance programs that serve older adults. Some target individuals who are 55 and over, some those 60 and over, and others those 65 and over. In choosing an age cutoff for the demand side of this analysis, we strove to use the most common denominator for programs, in the sense that all programs in the analysis serve individuals age 65 and over while not all serve “younger” older adults.

Additionally, income eligibility for these programs varies and for some is not tightly defined. Since research shows that it takes about 2 times the poverty line for older adults in Chicago to make ends meet<sup>7</sup> and a rough standard for nutrition program eligibility is 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold, this is the income cutoff used to define need in this analysis.

#### Calculation Used to Determine Program Coverage

$$\text{Number of meals (supply)} \div \text{Number of economically vulnerable older adults (demand)} = \text{Number of meals served per person in need annually}$$

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *Poverty thresholds for 2010 by size of family and number of children under 18 years*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/>

<sup>6</sup> Health and Medicine Policy Research Group. (2011). *Elder Economic Security Initiative (EESI) Illinois*. Available at: [http://hmprg.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/ElderEconomicSecurity\\_Illinois.pdf](http://hmprg.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/ElderEconomicSecurity_Illinois.pdf)

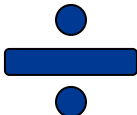

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## Total Meals: All Programs

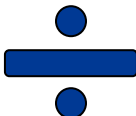

There are 39,535,708 meals served annually in Chicago to older adults through food assistance programs, and 15,303,150 served in Suburban Cook County. These counts of meals comprise the supply side of the equation in this analysis.

In Chicago there are 115,677 economically vulnerable older adults (age 65 and over with household incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty threshold) and 67,768 economically vulnerable older adults in Suburban Cook County. These estimates of economically vulnerable adults comprise the demand side of the equation in this analysis.

### Chicago

39,535,708 meals (supply)		115,677 economically vulnerable older adults (demand)		341.78 meals served per person in need (341.78 to 1)
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### Suburban Cook County

15,303,150 meals (supply)		67,768 economically vulnerable older adults (demand)		225.82 meals served per person in need (225.82 to 1)
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Considering that any given individual eating three meals a day consumes 1,095 meals a year, older adults with very limited resources are collectively left fending for themselves on limited incomes for 69 percent of their meals in Chicago and 79 percent in Suburban Cook County. On the whole, while need is greater in Chicago than in Suburban Cook County, need is being better met in the city than in Suburban areas: there are 51 percent more meals served per person in need on an annual basis in Chicago than in Suburban Cook County.

This general look at the city and suburbs masks neighborhood and township differences. Table 1 displays the ten Chicago Community Areas (CCAs) with the least program coverage and Table 2 displays the ten Suburban Cook County townships with the least program coverage relative to need.

Map 1 visually depicts townships and CCAs by program coverage in relation to need. Interestingly, the CCAs with the least program coverage are clustered around the edges of the city. Similarly, 4 of the 5 townships with least program coverage—Hanover, Schaumburg, Lemont, and Orland—are on either the northwest or southwest edges of Cook County.

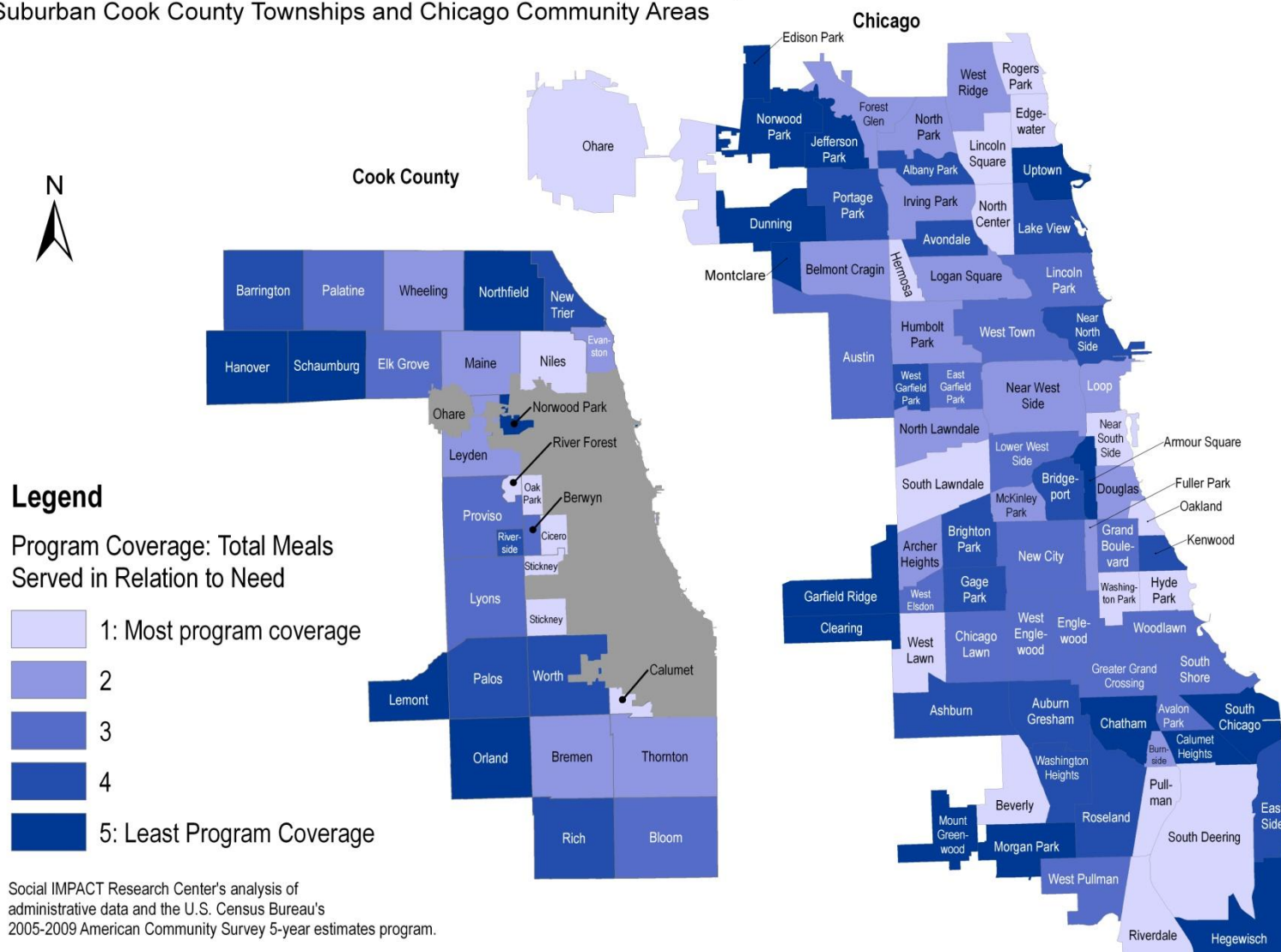
**Table 1. Program Coverage: Total Meals Served in Relation to Need by Chicago Community Areas (CCA)**

CCA	Number of Total Meals Served	Number of Economically Vulnerable Older Adults	Ratio of Meals Served to Older Adults in Need
Norwood Park	193,703	1,689	114.69 to 1
Edison Park	42,003	361	116.35 to 1
Garfield Ridge	201,069	1,691	118.91 to 1
Clearing	116,944	907	128.94 to 1
Mount Greenwood	69,274	536	129.24 to 1
Morgan Park	218,152	1,391	156.83 to 1
Dunning	396,570	2,150	184.45 to 1
Calumet Heights	219,213	1,118	196.08 to 1
Montclare	136,322	662	205.92 to 1
Jefferson Park	235,572	1,133	207.92 to 1

**Table 2. Program Coverage: Total Meals Served in Relation to Need by Suburban Cook County Townships**

Township	Number of Total Meals Served	Number of Economically Vulnerable Older Adults	Ratio of Meals Served to Older Adults in Need
Lemont	24,260	508	47.76 to 1
Hanover	78,049	1,352	57.73 to 1
Orland	167,078	1,922	86.93 to 1
Norwood Park	151,641	1,331	113.93 to 1
Schaumburg	362,730	2,652	136.78 to 1
Northfield	296,546	1,985	149.39 to 1
Worth	854,691	5,671	150.71 to 1
Riverside	60,928	400	152.32 to 1
New Trier	113,999	658	173.25 to 1
Barrington	47,625	267	178.37 to 1

Map 1. Program Coverage: Total Meals Served in Relation to Need by Suburban Cook County Townships and Chicago Community Areas



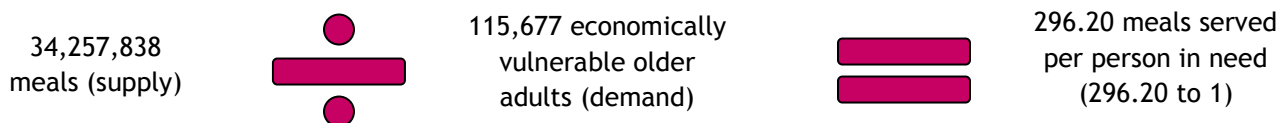
Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of administrative data and the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year estimates program.

## SNAP-Only Meals

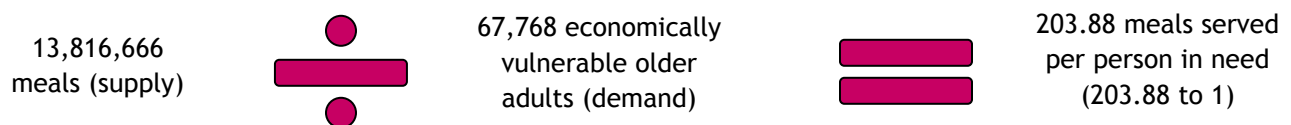
SNAP meals comprise the lion's share of meals included in this analysis: 87 percent of meals served in Chicago and 90 percent of meals served in Suburban Cook County to older adults. Since the SNAP program operates in a very different manner than other food assistance programs for older adults, this section focuses on program coverage of SNAP and the following section focuses on program coverage of all other programs combined without including SNAP.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is responsible for providing for 34,257,838 meals in Chicago to older adults and 13,816,666 in Suburban Cook County. It is important to note, however, that despite SNAP providing for the lion's share of meals to older adults, only 34 percent of eligible older adults receive SNAP.<sup>8</sup>

### Chicago



### Suburban Cook County



The SNAP program is responsible for providing 45 percent more meals per person in Chicago than in Suburban Cook County, indicating that need is being better met in the city than in Suburban areas, though need in terms of sheer numbers of economically vulnerable adults is great in Chicago.

Table 3 displays the ten Chicago Community Areas with the least SNAP-only program coverage and Table 4 displays the ten Suburban Cook County townships with the least SNAP-only program coverage.

Map 2 visually depicts townships and CCAs by program coverage in relation to need for SNAP-only meals. Not surprisingly since SNAP meals constitute such a large share of total meals, the geographic patterns of the least SNAP-only program coverage is similar to patterns for least total meals program coverage. CCAs with the least SNAP-only program coverage are, for the most part, clustered around the edges of the city. Similarly, 4 of the 5 townships with least SNAP-only program coverage—Hanover, Barrington, Lemont, and Orland—are on either the northwest or southwest edges of Cook County.

### Table 3. Program Coverage: SNAP-Only Meals Served in Relation to Need by Chicago Community Areas (CCA)

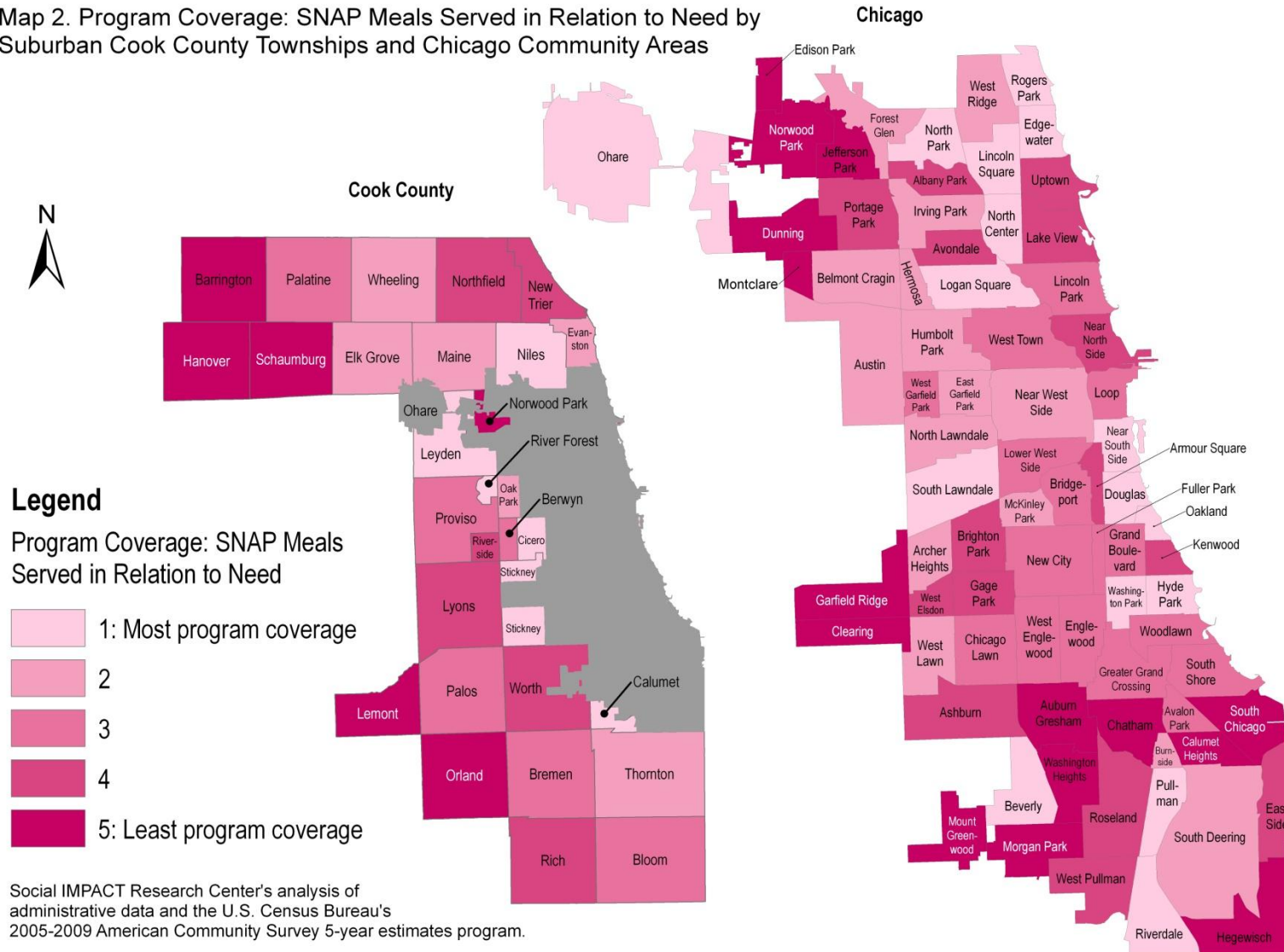
<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2011). *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation rates: Fiscal years 2002-2009 (Summary)*. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Trends2002-09Sum.pdf>

CCA	Number of SNAP-Only Meals Served	Number of Economically Vulnerable Older Adults	Ratio of Meals Served to Older Adults in Need
Mount Greenwood	17,401	536	32.5 to 1
Edison Park	23,172	361	64.2 to 1
Garfield Ridge	152,977	1,691	90.5 to 1
Norwood Park	154,139	1,689	91.3 to 1
Clearing	93,297	907	102.9 to 1
Morgan Park	173,499	1,391	124.7 to 1
Calumet Heights	156,230	1,118	139.7 to 1
Montclare	93,836	662	141.7 to 1
South Chicago	271,584	1,719	158.0 to 1
Dunning	353,988	2,150	164.6 to 1

**Table 4. Program Coverage: SNAP-Only Meals Served in Relation to Need by Suburban Cook County Townships**

Township	Number of SNAP-Only Meals Served	Number of Economically Vulnerable Older Adults	Ratio of Meals Served to Older Adults in Need
Lemont	17,390	508	14,307 to 1
Hanover	49,857	1,352	41,017 to 1
Orland	168,455	1,922	138,587 to 1
Norwood Park	148,968	1,331	122,555 to 1
Barrington	355,543	267	31,297 to 1
Schaumburg	38,042	2,652	310,887 to 1
Riverside	472,819	400	54,149 to 1
Worth	65,819	5,671	773,776 to 1
Northfield	940,538	1,985	289,086 to 1
Rich	351,393	2,265	347,431 to 1

Map 2. Program Coverage: SNAP Meals Served in Relation to Need by Suburban Cook County Townships and Chicago Community Areas

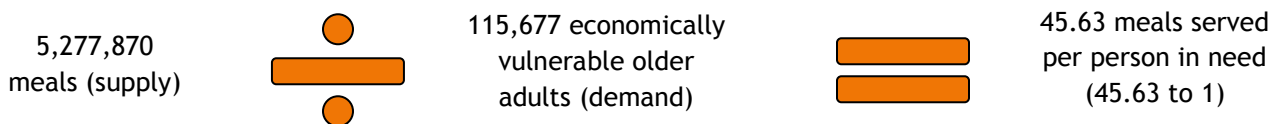




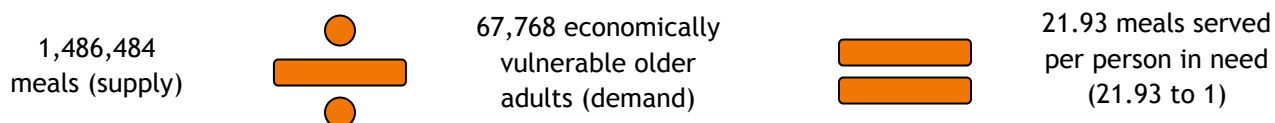
## Non-SNAP Meals

Food assistance programs other than SNAP (CACFP, TEFAP, HDM, CM, CFSP) are responsible for providing for 5,277,870 meals in Chicago to older adults and 1,486,484 in Suburban Cook County.

### Chicago



### Suburban Cook County



Though non-SNAP programs provide far less coverage than the SNAP program, the same pattern holds related to disparities between Chicago and Suburban Cook County: non-SNAP programs provide over twice as many meals per person in need in Chicago than in Suburban Cook County, indicating that need is being better met in the city than in Suburban areas.

Table 5 displays the ten Chicago Community Areas with the least non-SNAP program coverage and Table 6 displays the ten Suburban Cook County townships with the least non-SNAP program coverage.

Map 3 visually depicts townships and CCAs by program coverage in relation to need for non-SNAP meals only. The 10 CCAs with the least non-SNAP program coverage are all north of Interstate 55 with the exceptions of McKinley Park and Archer Heights, which are immediately south of the interstate. Similarly, 4 of the 5 townships with least non-SNAP program coverage are on the far north side of Cook County, the exception being Palos.



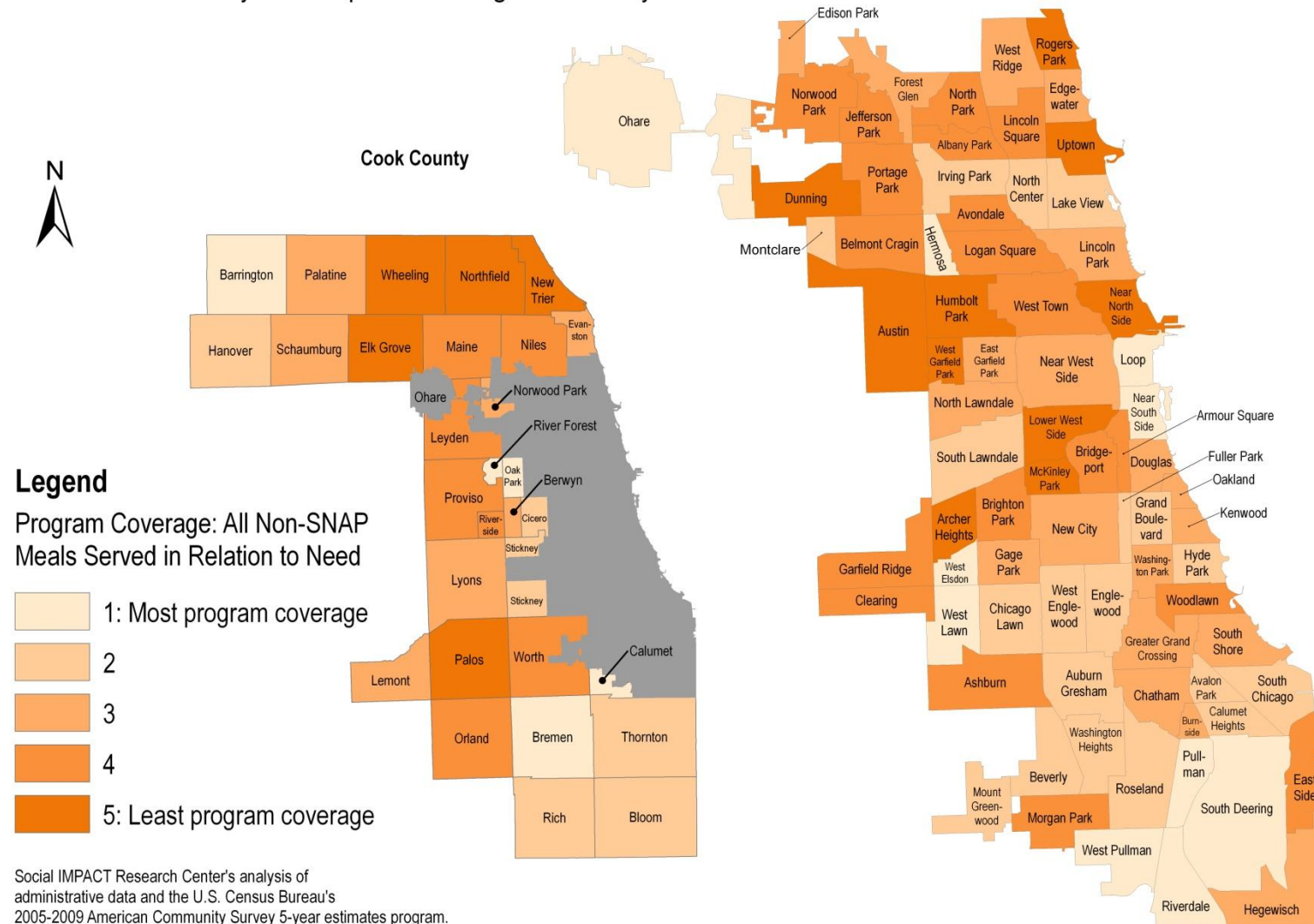
**Table 5. Program Coverage: Non-SNAP Meals Served in Relation to Need by Chicago Community Areas (CCA)**

CCA	Number of Non-SNAP Meals Served	Number of Economically Vulnerable Older Adults	Ratio of Meals Served to Older Adults in Need
Uptown	79,146	5,680	13.93 to 1
Lower West Side	25,924	1,831	14.16 to 1
Humboldt Park	37,433	2,535	14.77 to 1
Archer Heights	7,974	451	17.68 to 1
Dunning	42,582	2,150	19.81 to 1
Near North Side	52,877	2,646	19.98 to 1
West Garfield Park	26,207	1,311	19.99 to 1
Austin	112,470	5,425	20.73 to 1
McKinley Park	10,940	525	20.84 to 1
Rogers Park	41,422	1,943	21.32 to 1

**Table 6. Program Coverage: Total Non-SNAP Meals Served in Relation to Need by Suburban Cook County Townships**

Township	Number of Non-SNAP Meals Served	Number of Economically Vulnerable Older Adults	Ratio of Meals Served to Older Adults in Need
Northfield	7,460	1,985	3.76 to 1
New Trier	3,002	658	4.56 to 1
Wheeling	29,114	4,234	6.88 to 1
Palos	10,530	1,321	7.97 to 1
Elk Grove	30,752	2,791	11.02 to 1
Maine	48,275	4,156	11.62 to 1
Leyden	45,827	3,218	14.24 to 1
Worth	80,915	5,671	14.27 to 1
Niles	54,458	3,777	14.42 to 1
Orland	28,491	1,922	14.82 to 1

Map 3. Program Coverage: Total Non-SNAP Meals Served in Relation to Need by Suburban Cook County Townships and Chicago Community Areas



Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of administrative data and the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year estimates program.

## Other Considerations

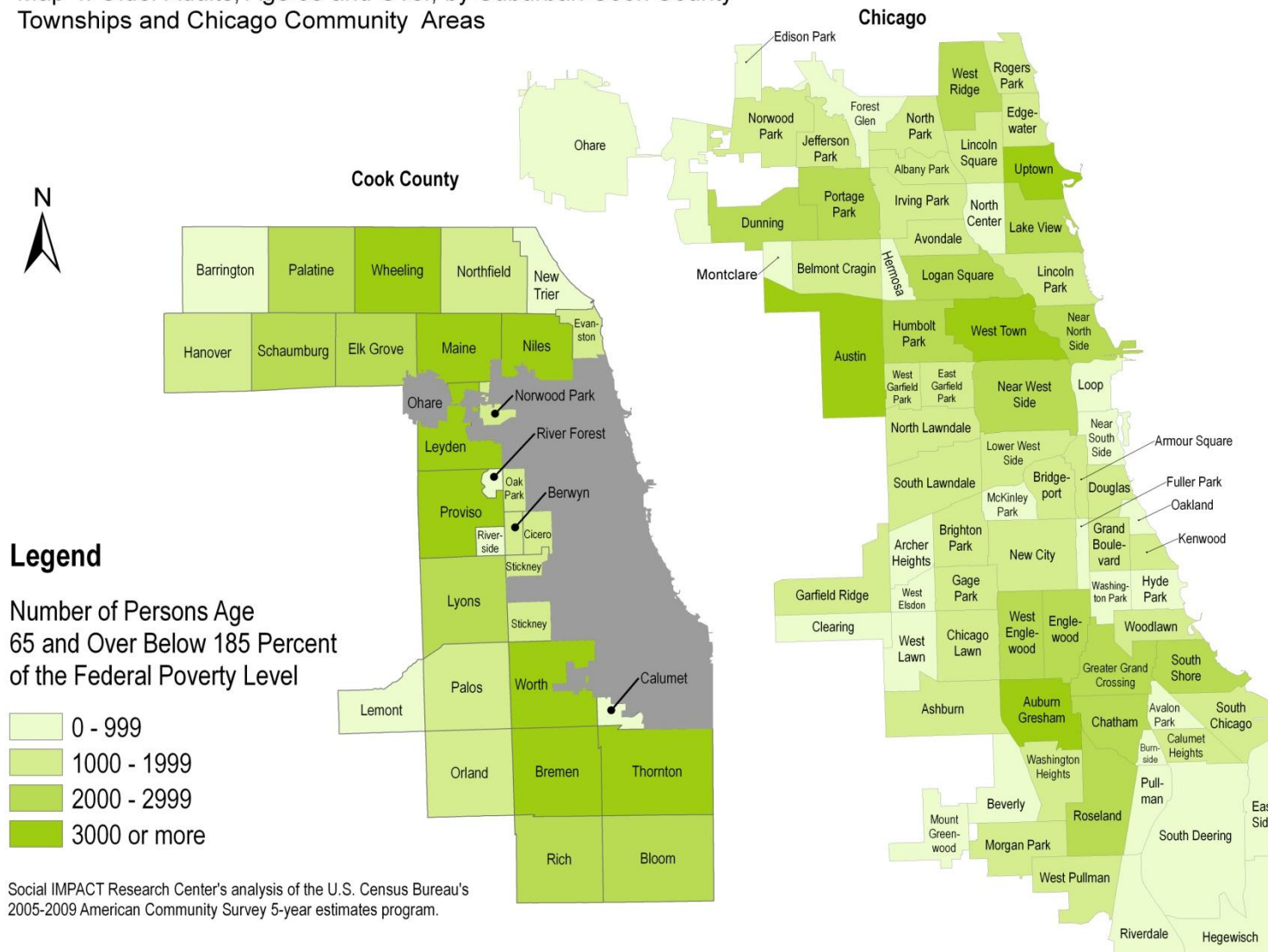
### **Relationship between Townships and CCAs with Least Program Coverage on Both SNAP-Only and Non-SNAP Meals**

The vast difference in meals provided by the SNAP program compared to non-SNAP nutrition programs warrants a closer look at program coverage differences by CCA and townships. Among CCAs, there is only one, Dunning, that appears on both the lists of least program coverage for SNAP-only and non-SNAP programs. Among townships, Northfield, Worth, and Orland appear on both lists. It would appear, then, that SNAP and other food assistance programs are reaching somewhat different places. This reality will likely have bearing on decisions of where to expand programs and outreach activities.

### **Level of Need**

Comparing meals served to need, as this analysis does, is an important way to think about unmet need. What gets drowned in such an analysis, however, is any indication of *magnitude* of need. That is to say that some CCAs and townships that show up as having the least program coverage actually have rather small numbers of economically vulnerable older adults. For instance, Barrington, Riverside, and Lemont townships rank poorly on program coverage but each has only 267, 400, and 508 older adults in need, respectively. Compare this to other townships, such as Thornton, which ranks favorably on program coverage but has 5,777 economically vulnerable adults; despite better program coverage, there are likely still *more* unserved older adults in Thornton than in Barrington. This reality, too, will likely have bearing on decisions of where to expand programs. Map 4 displays the number of economically vulnerable older adults.

Map 4. Older Adults, Age 65 and Over, by Suburban Cook County Townships and Chicago Community Areas



## Recommendations

This analysis has highlighted that hundreds of thousands of older adults are at risk of hunger and food insecurity in Cook County. While SNAP provides the cornerstone of nutritional assistance for older adults, available resources for federal nutrition programs are not commensurate with need. Further, certain townships and community areas have less program coverage than others, and resources for older adult nutrition programming are particularly scarce in Suburban Cook County.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations should be considered to strengthen nutritional programming for older adults:

- **Food and nutrition programs**, particularly SNAP, are critical supports for low-income older adults **and should be protected and expanded**. For example:
  - The Farm Bill sets policy and funding levels for SNAP, CSFP, and TEFAP. The next Farm Bill needs to ensure these programs adequately serve this population.
  - Federal funding for both congregate and home delivered meals is included in the Older Adult Act, which should be **protected and expanded**.
- While SNAP is the primary source for food assistance in Cook County for older adults, there is great room for improvement, and **SNAP outreach targeted to older adults should increase**.
- **Use data-driven metrics to inform food distribution decisions**. Analyses like this one illuminate areas of greatest unmet need and allow for more effective and efficient targeting of resources.

# Appendix: Methods

## Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

**Original geography:** Zip code

**Original unit:** Number of recipients

**Original age:** 60 and over

**Original time frame:** by month, for FY 2010 (10/09-9/10)

**Conversion to meals:** Translated number of recipients in the year (duplicated) into total number of SNAP dollars and translated that into number of meals.

- Used average monthly benefit amount to households with seniors from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services report *Characteristics of SNAP Households: FY 2010* and converted to personal benefit amount.
  - \$119: Average monthly benefit amount for senior living alone is \$119, divided by household size of 1.
  - \$99: Average monthly benefit amount for a 2-person senior-only household is \$198, divided by household size of 2.
  - \$118: Average monthly benefit for a household containing seniors and non-seniors is \$285, divided by average household size of such a household which is 2.4 people.
- Determined share of seniors below 185% FPL in Cook County in each household type using 2010 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata and weighted the above derived personal benefit amounts accordingly to get a weighted average personal benefit amount of \$116.
- To determine a dollar amount per meal: used the USDA Food Plan for the cost of food at home, U.S. average, June 2010, which the USDA uses as its annual average. Used the Low-Cost plan, weekly cost. Weighted the male and female and age groups 51-70 and 71+ with 2009 ACS single-year data on age and sex. Age groups don't match exactly: ACS is 50 to 69 and 70+. Also, SNAP data are for those 60+ but food plan data don't distinguish 19-50 year old data. Divided resulting weekly cost by 21 meals to arrive at \$2.11.
- Multiplied total number of seniors receiving SNAP by derived average personal benefit amount of \$116 to get a total dollar figure of money available to buy meals and divided that by \$2.11 to determine how many meals the SNAP benefit would be able to purchase.

### Conversion to CCAs and Townships:

- Disregarded non-Cook County zip codes
- Zip codes were converted to CCA's by using GIS tools to determine what percent of each zip codes falls within each CCA and township and then multiplying each zip codes' meal data by that percentage and adding up the resulting figures for each CCA and township.

## **The Emergency Food Assistance Program**

**Original geography:** City in suburbs and Chicago Community Area in city

**Original unit:** Total pounds distributed

**Original age:** All ages

**Original time frame:** Fiscal Year 2010 (7/09 to 6/10)

### **Conversion to older adults:**

- Determined estimated number of meals distributed by dividing total pounds by 1.3 conversion rate supplied by the Food Depository.
- Multiplied approximate number of meals by 4.3 percent to determine number of meals going to older adults. Rate taken from Feeding America's 2010 Hunger Study, rate of Cook County food assistance recipients who are older adults (65+).

### **Conversion to CCAs and Townships:**

- Chicago: Done in original data set
- Suburbs: Determined which townships each of the cities are in. For those that are in multiple Cook County townships, meals were divided evenly between them.

## **Commodity Supplemental Food Program**

**Original geography:** Total Cook County

**Original unit:** Meals

**Original age:** All ages but over 97 percent goes to older adults, per IDHS

**Original time frame:** FY10

### **Conversion to CCAs and Townships:**

- Suburbs:
  - Since we received just one total number of meals for all of Cook County, we first determined which share of total meals go to Suburban Cook County of all other programs in this analysis. We used the average of that share (26.9 percent) and multiplied the total Cook County figure for CSFP by that percentage to get an estimated number of meals distributed in Suburban Cook County.
  - The total Suburban Cook County estimate was distributed proportionately into townships based on the share of all older adults age 60+ living in each township.
- Chicago:

- The meals allocated to the city of Chicago were divided proportionately based on the CCA location of city CSFP sites.

## **Home Delivered Meals and Congregate Meals Programs (Golden Diners in Chicago)**

### **Original geography:**

- Suburbs: By provider, with indication of what townships/cities that provider serves
- Chicago: Chicago Community Area

### **Original unit:**

- Suburbs: Meals
- Chicago: Unduplicated persons served

### **Original age: 60+**

### **Original time frame:**

- Suburbs: Fiscal year 2010
- Chicago: Calendar year 2010

### **Conversion to CCAs and Townships:**

- Suburbs: First, cities were allocated to their respective townships. Second, since data were given by the provider, and providers often served more than one township (but just one number was given for each provider), meals had to be distributed among the various townships served by any given provider. This was determined by gathering population data. For each township that the provider served, we determined the number of 60+ adults living in the township. Next, we determined what percentage of total adults served by the provider lived in each township the provider serves. Last, we multiplied the resulting percentage by the total number of meals served.
- Chicago: Done in original data set

## **Child and Adult Care Food Program**

**Original geography:** Data were given by providing agency with indication of what townships (suburbs) and zip codes (city) each agency serves

**Original unit:** Total assistance in dollars

**Original age:** Older adults, undefined

**Original time frame:** Fiscal year 2010



**Conversion to meals:** Divided total assistance in dollars by \$2.37, a rate supplied by the Food Depository

**Conversion to CCA's and Townships:**

- Suburbs: Since data were given by the provider, and providers often served more than one township (but just one number was given for each provider), meals had to be distributed among the various townships served by any given provider. This was determined by gathering population data. For each township that the provider served, we determined the number of 60+ adults living in the township. Next, we determined what percentage of total adults served by the provider lived in each township the provider serves. Last, we multiplied the resulting percentage by the total number of meals served.
- City: Zip codes were converted to CCA's by using GIS tools to determine what percent of each zip codes falls within each CCA and township and then multiplying each zip codes' meal data by that percentage and adding up the resulting figures for each CCA and township.